

## **The Dunes Inn** by flippyspoon

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**Summary:**

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## The Dunes Inn

Steve hasn't even caught his breath yet and Billy is already up.

That's how it usually goes. Except unlike the first couple months, Billy doesn't take off. These days he sits up in Steve's sheets--naked and sated--and smokes, and when his cigarette is spent he starts wandering around Steve's bedroom.

Like usual, Steve tries to draw him out a little and like usual, it goes nowhere.

"What's summer like in San Diego?" Steve says. He folds up one knee, rests his chin on it, watches Billy pace around with another cigarette in his mouth. Billy kneels at Steve's chest of drawers and opens the bottom one with a grave look on his face, like he's searching the place for drugs.

Maybe he is. Who the hell's knows. It's been three months of this and Steve can't even begin to figure out how Billy feels unless he's angry or euphoric. Even then it's a toss-up because a lot of times angry really means scared or sad and euphoric could mean angry.

"Hot," Billy grunts.

"Right," Steve says. Billy rifles through all the shirts and whatever shit Steve has in that bottom drawer. Steve can't think of anything particularly criminal that he needs to hide. It's *weird* yes, but if Billy wants to go pawing through his shit, well, whatever. At least he's not leaving.

Billy's murmuring. Steve hears him snort a laugh at, probably, Steve's choice in undershirts or something. He takes out an old shoebox. Steve can't remember the contents; postcards and dumb mementos from childhood probably, and sits on the bed. For a while he just stares into the box, smoking.

Since he's returned to the bed, Steve takes the opportunity to get closer, inches up to Billy's back, lays a kiss by that enticing mole on his shoulder.

“Hang on, Harrington,” Billy mutters, and waves his cigarette hand as if Steve is interrupting his favorite show.

It *stings*. Steve has an urge to throw him out. Except what if he doesn’t come back? And the orgasms... He can’t risk losing those.

Steve flips him the bird behind his back and turns in a huff, grabbing the current issue of *Rolling Stone* from his nightstand and sulkily thumbing through it.

It’s a good five minutes of this and then he feels Billy’s weight shift and there’s a calloused finger softly tracing around the muscles of Steve’s back.

This is a recent thing. Sometimes if Steve deliberately ignores Billy, suddenly there he is, like a needy cat. When Steve does it, he gets shut down. Still, he can’t help but let Billy’s fingers have their way with his skin, draw lines from mole to mole. Sometimes Billy will sit and kiss seemingly each vertebrae. He never says anything about it, but Billy seems to have some kind of *thing* for Steve’s back. Steve doesn’t say anything either, afraid the spell will break.

Now he lets himself enjoy this particular moment where he can still smell their sex and Billy’s cologne and it’s a little too warm in the room, the afternoon sun shooting lines of light through the blinds that draw stripes on their bodies as Billy breathes smoke and makes love to Steve’s back.

Everything is so complicated with Billy. There’s so much...nuance. Steve is not great with naunce. He’d thought Nancy was complicated but that had been easy by comparison. Yet nothing with Nancy had turned out to be real on her side. Did “real” always have to be so...layered?

Eventually Billy leaves.

Is it weird that out of the bedroom, things seem easy? They’re buddies which means they hang out and drink beer and bicker a lot and laugh a lot and Billy drives him *insane* sometimes and other times he has to talk Billy down from knocking somebody out at school and other times Billy drags him into a dark corner and kisses him and

rests his forehead against Steve's for a long minute like Steve is his only source of oxygen.

Steve knows about Billy's dad and if there's one thing Billy's touchy about it's shit with his dad so when Billy treats Steve like oxygen he assumes it's about Neil and he doesn't ask about that either. Not yet.

"What's your mom like?" Steve says one night. Billy is sitting at Steve's desk looking through his yearbooks.

Billy looks up at him sharply, frowning around his cigarette. "What?"

"Not Susan," Steve clarifies, a little encouraged that Billy has responded beyond a grunt. "I mean your real mom. Back in Cali. What's she like?"

Billy gives him a look like he's just remembered he left a stove on back home and says, "Oh... She's dead. Thought you knew that."

Steve has an urge to climb under his covers and let Billy leave like he probably wants to now.

*Idiot.*

Except that he's certain that Billy has never mentioned this. He would've remembered. He's starving for information about Billy Hargrove. Somehow he'd gotten it into his head that Billy's mom was back in California, maybe with some job that tied her up or something. He can't remember what gave him that impression.

"Man..." Steve sighs and rubs his eyes. "I'm sorry. Billy, I'm sorry. I didn't-"

"Whatever," Billy says. "It's fine."

Except that it's definitely not because Billy stands up and starts putting his clothes on. Steve wonders if he's just lost everything. But then, if Billy is this easy to lose, maybe he's just unattainable. Maybe Steve is just unlovable, maybe maybe...

This is just worry talking, Steve knows. He's oxygen. Billy can't just toss out oxygen.

Billy's called late at night several times, speaking in whispers over the phone just to hear Steve's voice after a fight with his dad. So...

Billy pulls on his t-shirt and then laces up his boots and then he's in the doorway and Steve is still naked on the bed.

"Billy-

"I'm not pissed," Billy says, looking right at him. He taps his knuckle on the door-jamb and his mouth tightens a little. "I just gotta go."

"Okay..." Steve doesn't know whether to believe him or not.

The next day at school, Billy is off, but not in the way Steve might have expected. Billy seems on edge but not angry. He just keeps staring at Steve, tapping his foot. He doesn't even bother to fuck with anyone all day. But after lunch he pulls Steve into a dark corner and kisses him the way he does when he's *inside* Steve, when the whole rest of the world disappears and it's just them. Steve thinks he might be levitating for a second.

"Can I come over early?" Billy says. He looks so intense, or more than usual even. Billy's eyes are practically glowing.

"Yeah," Steve says. "You'll have to eat dinner with my parents though."

"I don't care."

Billy has eaten dinner with the Harringtons before. Steve couldn't believe how well it went except that Billy can put on the charm and pretend to be well behaved whenever he wants to and it wouldn't occur to the Harringtons that their son liked dick if it was on videotape in front of them: everybody wins.

So Billy comes over after school and they do homework for a bit except that Billy, who's usually far more studious than Steve (eerily reminiscent of Nancy in that way) is acting like a happy puppy now; he flicks Steve's hair with his pen, plays footsie, pinches Steve's ass, draws a dick on Steve's jeans with his Bic...

"Cut it out," Steve says, shoving Billy's thigh with his socked foot.

They're in the Harrington living room, his parents are just a room away. *Bonanza* is on TV. Billy is smiling at him, his tongue between his teeth.

"Make me," Billy says.

So Steve has to kiss him.

At dinner, Billy keeps making Steve laugh so that he has to cover with a cough. Dinners with his parents usually mean Steve saying the same old routine shit about school, scarfing up his food, and getting the hell away from the awkward silences.

Billy changes everything.

He sits across from Steve at a dining table that's too big for such a small family. His mother is at one end, his father is at the other.

"You need a haircut," Steve's mother says to his father. "You look like a hooligan."

"Do I?" His father says.

His dad's hair doesn't look much longer than usual. Maybe a quarter of an inch. He's pretty sure his mom is really talking about Billy. She does that sometimes; talks around things instead of going at them from the front. What did Nancy call it? Passive-aggressive. Nancy picked that up from *Donahue*.

His father seems to take it at face value and says, "I'll have Connie make an appointment then."

Billy looks across the table at Steve and makes a blow-job gesture and Steve almost snorts Chicken Diane up his nose. He grabs his napkin and holds it in front of his face.

Connie is his dad's secretary. It's become totally obvious that his dad has been having an affair with Connie. He told Billy this. Now his mother's eyes flash. Steve would feel sorry for his mom except that, well, he just doesn't. His parents have always been like business partners more than anything. There's a tiny part of Steve just aware enough to see that this is *why* he has a bottomless well of loneliness

inside him.

"This is a lovely dinner, Mrs. Harrington," Billy says.

"Oh, thank you, William."

*William.* Steve rolls his eyes. Billy shoots him a sneaky smile.

"So what was little Stevie here like as a kid?" Billy says, glancing between Steve's parents.

*What.*

Steve sinks down into his seat. Steve's mom looks surprised by the question as she swallows her asparagus.

"Restless," his mother said. "He couldn't sit still for more than two minutes together. Wasn't he restless?" She looks to his dad for confirmation.

"Very restless," his father agrees.

"How long was he in the Boy Scouts for?" Billy says.

Steve does a little double-take at that. He's never mentioned the Boy Scouts to Billy. He was only in it maybe a year, enough to go on a few camping trips and then lose interest.

Steve starts to say, "Not that long-"

"I'd forgotten about that," his mother says, laughing.

"I was in the Boy Scouts," Billy says.

"You were not." Steve kicks him under the table.

"I was," Billy says, shrugging. "Got kicked out."

"Course you did."

"Probably should have stayed in longer," Steve's father says to him across the table. "Would have looked good on applications at least."

Steve stiffens in his seat, bracing himself. He'd thought his dad would be happy about the idea of Steve going to work for him and Steve hadn't thought much about what it would be like. But his dad is so dour about it. Now all he can think of is a future of being condescended to and treated like the family disappointment. He's implied as much to Billy who thinks it's insane that Steve wouldn't just take off when he's eighteen.

Now Steve imagines taking off in a blue Camaro, chasing the Pacific Ocean...

"You guys still go down to Florida?" Billy says.

Steve stares at him, questioning. Where is Billy getting all this? Steve's pretty sure he's never mentioned Florida and he's definitely never mentioned the Boy Scouts.

"Oh!" His mother startles and taps her plate with her fork. Her Chicken Diane is only half-finished, but she's probably on another diet. "We haven't been down to Florida in years."

Steve mouths at Billy: "What the hell?"

Billy just smirks, looking perfectly content to eat dinner with the Harringtons and paw at their family history. It's the weirdest thing Steve's ever seen including the husk of a demodog skin in Dustin's cellar.

They used to go down to Florida to visit his mother's sister but she moved again. They were fun trips in Steve's memory. Florida was like some other planet, everything so colorful and alien and alive. He wonders if California is like that.

The question spurs Steve's mother to say she should call her sister and then Steve's father says Silvia could just as easily call *them* and things go a bit frigid. Mercifully, Steve and Billy are done eating and are excused from the table.

They jog up the stairs to Steve's room and the moment the door is closed, Billy's hands are on Steve.

"Hey there." Billy's up behind him, hands around his waist. "*Amigo.*"



“What was all that at dinner?” Steve says, turning around in the circle of Billy’s arms. “How’d you even know I was a Boy Scout?”

“You got all those badges,” Billy says, giving him the bedroom eyes, as if it’s a sexy secret. “A knot making badge, survival skills badge... In that shoebox. And postcards from Florida.”

“Why do you look at all that stuff?” Steve says, smiling lopsided. “I thought you were just looking for weed.”

“I like seeing all your shit,” Billy says softly. “I ask you stuff all the time, you act like there’s nothing to know.”

Does he?

Steve thinks about it. He remembers Billy asking him if he played basketball in a kid’s league as a boy. Steve had and said so but changed the subject because what had it led to? Some good games in high school but nothing very special. Billy once asked him if he read much. Sometimes he picks up a pop novel or reads comic books that Dustin says are particularly good and he blows through magazines a lot. But Billy is *smart* and English is his best subject. He’d blown off that question too, crippled by insecurity.

He realizes he probably does this a lot.

Most of the time when they talk it’s about people at school, basketball, TV and movies, and music (a contentious debate that never ends).

“Oh,” Steve says. “Well, you do that too, Mr. Mysterious. Can’t get anything out of you.”

Billy has no answer to that. His eyes dart around the room and he sighs and makes a little frustrated noise.

“What was your mom like?” Steve says. “Were you guys close or was it like with...?”

He doesn’t even say the word, he doesn’t have to. Billy shakes his head. “No. I mean yeah, we were close. Um...” He scratches his head and moves to sit on the bed, digging out his wallet. He flips it open

and digs out a worn color photograph and hands it over. "That's her."

Billy's mom has a little heart-shaped face and piercing blue eyes like Billy's. Her hair is a mass of frizzy curls fluffed out as big as possible and she's wearing a puffy-sleeved floral chiffon number.

"Damn," Steve says. "You got her looks. She's gorgeous."

Billy looks like he wants to say something but doesn't. He takes his cigarettes and Zippo out of his jacket and tosses it at the desk chair. "The Florida shit reminded me of ah..." He rolls his neck and lights a smoke.

Steve toes off his shoes and plops down next to him on the bed. "Of...?"

"So she used to try to...get between me and my dad," Billy says. "Old man just never liked me. He never really acted like he was too sweet on her either to be honest. Anyway, when I was ten, I got home from school one day and... Well, I never really knew what happened. Place was trashed. My mom was balling. My dad wasn't there. But she'd packed our bags. Said that's it, we're out of here. We're hitting the road, right?" He's looking to the window, as if his story is projected there on a screen and Steve scoots closer. When he rests a hand on Billy's shoulder, he's not dismissed.

"So we drove up to L.A.," Billy says. "I'd been a few times. But it felt different, ya know? Like we were a million miles away from him. And we were supposed to stay at somebody's house...somewhere around Hollywood. In a canyon... I dunno whose house. My aunt's friend or something maybe? But the chick's boyfriend was like who's this bitch and her kid. So we went to a shitty motel. The Dunes Inn." Billy chuckles to himself and smokes and Steve watches the smoke spiral in the quiet dimness of the room as it dances with particles in a sunbeam. "Right on Sunset Boulevard, ya know? Right in the middle of Hollywood. That place... It's like even if nothing's going on it's exciting. And the way she talked, man. Like this is it. We're gone. We're free. And now, ya know..." He voice breaks a little, gets soft and high, and Steve has to lean his head against Billy's back because he can't help himself, wants to feel him breathe. "I know she was bullshitting? She just wanted to pretend for a while. But I was ten

so... I bought it. I totally bought it. I thought we were... “ He wipes his eyes and says, “So we had these two weeks anyway. Of just fuckin’ around. She tried to look for work but... We would’ve been on the sidewalk if she hadn’t called him by that last day. So two days later we’re back home and... I’d never seen him so mad. It was worse after that. And the next year she got sick. Died when I was twelve.”

Steve does some math in his head. That means it’s only been about five years since his mother died. After which there would have been a few years when it was just Billy and Neil. Doubtless the worst time of Billy’s life.

“She didn’t like a lot of people really,” Billy says. “She’d bitch about everybody. She would’ve liked you though.”

Steve can’t help but think that’s just a nice thing to say except that Billy is never nice for the sake of it. “Why?” Steve says.

“Because...I like you, I guess.” Billy finds Steve’s hand and brings it around him and Steve squeezes him tighter from behind. “Anyway, the Florida postcards reminded me of that. The Dunes Inn.”

“I *do* like you, ya know,” Steve says. He closes his eyes and pretends he’s just talking to Billy’s muscled back, solid and broad beneath his cheek, clothed in soft jersey. “I mean I like you as in I’m totally crazy about you. Like...head over heels, dude.”

Steve feels Billy’s muscles relax and he turns his head to kiss Billy’s shoulder and move his hair so he can kiss the nape of Billy’s neck. Billy doesn’t say anything but Steve doesn’t mind it this time. He thinks of Billy’s forehead resting against his in dark corners, the way he grins at Steve across the court now because they’re always predicting each other’s next move, the way he nudges Steve’s foot under the desks at school if he sees Steve is especially stressed out.

*Oxygen.*

“Back at you,” Billy says.  
“Yeah?”

Billy twists around to look at Steve, his face screwed up into disgust.

“You think I’d eat that Chicken fuckin’ Diane with your parents and the sticks they keep rammed up their asses if I wasn’t so balls to the wall in love with you, dumbass?”

“C’mere.”

Steve loves it when Billy’s inside him but he think he loves being inside Billy more. He’s focused tonight, methodical. He wants to take Billy apart piece by piece and put him back together even better than he was. Usually they play music but right now it’s just them in the quiet and Steve presses kisses all over Billy’s body from fingertips to toes. He loves this part and sometimes Billy gets impatient but now he’s only breathing, waiting, letting Steve unravel him, his eyes bright. He’s not even talking and Billy usually never shuts up in bed. This time it’s Steve who can’t stop talking.

“I want to know everything about you,” Steve whispers into his skin, marveling at each curve of muscle, hard but beautiful. He loves Billy’s density, how solid and thick he is, how there’s so much to hold onto. “Even the shit you don’t want to tell me, I wanna know, yeah?”

Billy only gasps a little in response as Steve slides a second finger in. “All that shit that pisses you off so much,” Steve mutters, hovering over Billy’s face and watching his mouth part as Steve moves his fingers. “I wanna know. ‘Cause I’m not going anywhere. And I need to know okay? I *need* to know you.”

He had other things he meant to say too but then he’s inside Billy and they’re moving together and Steve wants to go deeper, deeper, deeper, hot and endless where Billy is and-

“Aah!” Billy throws his head back and Steve kisses his throat.

“Are you mine, baby?” Steve whispers. He’s always wanted to say it to Billy and never had the nerve, certain he’d be laughed at.

“Yeah,” Billy says, nodding, and he opens his eyes again. “Fuck, Steve...I’ve always been yours.”

Afterwards, Billy takes the shoebox out again. But now he asks Steve questions about every little thing. Why did he keep those shoelaces? Who did he see that movie with? Was it a date? Did he like her? Did

he ever like a boy before Billy? And this time when Steve asks questions back, Billy answers them and he lets Steve hold him while they talk.

“Do you think The Dunes Inn is still around?” Steve says. Billy is lying down now and Steve is lazily kissing his thigh.

“I dunno,” Billy says, bemused. “Why?”

“We’ll have to have somewhere to stay at first when we go,” Steve says and watches Billy carefully. “No bullshitting. No pretending. You and me. We’re gonna go. Free.”

Steve doesn’t look away until he sees that Billy believes him. “Okay,” Billy says, and he sounds like he might be ten-years-old. “I’m all yours.”